

VZCZCXRO9626  
OO RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHLB #0200/01 0371629  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 061629Z FEB 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7353  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0835  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 000200

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: SINIORA RECOMMENDS DUAL TRACK:  
FORMATION OF TRIBUNAL COMMITTEE, WHILE BUILDING SUPPORT FOR  
CHAPTER VII

REF: BEIRUT 184

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

SUMMARY

-----

1. (C) In a 2/5 meeting with the Ambassador, PM Siniora interpreted Nabih Berri's support for a cross-confessional "tribunal document study committee" (reftel) as a Syrian ploy to avoid the fait accompli of a Chapter VII decision. Siniora maintained that Berri is clearly carrying out Syrian orders, and such a suggestion reflects growing concern in Damascus that Chapter VII may be gaining traction among the P-5. Although Siniora implied the committee would become an endless debating society (similar to last year's ill-fated National Dialogue, another Berri creation), he said it nevertheless could be used to dampen tension and gain time to build support for a Chapter VII resolution to establish the Tribunal. Siniora also saw the possibility that acceptance of the committee might give Hizballah the face-saving measure it needs to call off its protests in the streets, a presence that is becoming a political liability for the March 8th opposition. The Prime Minister asked Washington to urge Arab League SYG Amr Moussa to travel to Beirut to assist with the establishment of the committee -- and frustrate Syria's efforts to block Moussa's mission. Concerning the continuing saga of Ambassador-designate to Washington Antoine Chedid, Embassy Beirut now believes Siniora's effort to compel President Lahoud's signature by "bundling" several ambassadorial appointments could backfire and result in Chedid missing the late-February credentialing ceremony. Finally, Siniora asked the U.S. to consider banning the future sale of cluster munitions to the region -- such a move would reflect well on the U.S. in Lebanon and help take the edge off the "made-in-U.S." charges that Hizballah so effectively employs. End summary.

2. (C) Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and Acting Foreign Minister Tarik Mitri received the Ambassador and Special Assistant at the PM's offices in the heavily-guarded Grand Serail. Senior advisors Mohamed Chatah and Rola Nouredine also attended the meeting. The Prime Minister was focused on both tactical and strategic challenges and displayed none of the fatigue he showed early last week.

3. (C) PM Siniora listened with interest to the Ambassador's description of the trial balloon Speaker Berri floated on 2/2 concerning a broadly representative committee that would study/approve the tribunal documents that

Siniora's cabinet sent to the UN Security Council in early November. Although he believed the idea was an excellent opportunity to return to badly-needed dialogue, Siniora was also convinced the proposal was a ploy that Berri had been directed to offer by his Syrian overlords. Siniora considered it a pre-emptive Syrian defense against the growing momentum for a UNSC Chapter VII resolution to establish the Special Tribunal, and in their eyes is intended to be nothing more than a non-productive delaying tactic. The Prime Minister believes Damascus is becoming increasingly unnerved by the steady round of Saudi-Iranian (minus Syria) negotiations, and may be preparing a fallback position with which to prevent establishment of the Tribunal.

#### PARALLEL TRACK

14. (C) Despite Syrian intentions, however, Siniora believes Berri's proposal could be exploited, specifically, in using the committee to reduce political (and sectarian) tensions, while quietly building support for Chapter VII. Advisor Chatah added that such a "concession" by the government might also provide Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah the political cover he needs to withdraw his supporters from downtown Beirut in advance of the pro-reform commemoration of February 14th -- the second anniversary of the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Chatah said he wasn't necessarily counting on such a welcome development, but even if it didn't occur, the government would buy valuable time. He remarked that just two weeks ago, the anti-government March 8th coalition had successfully shut down the city and was confident that it was close to toppling the Siniora government. But now the opposition is apparently proposing a plan that would make it "very difficult" for them to continue

BEIRUT 00000200 002 OF 004

with street actions -- their most powerful political weapon.

15. (C) The Prime Minister reiterated his earlier stated intent to discuss Chapter VII possibilities with both P-5 ambassadors and, whenever the opportunity presented itself, directly with the P-5 governments. He noted that Russia in particular appeared to be gradually changing its previous opposition to Chapter VII and said there may be real progress on this issue when President Vladimir Putin visits Riyadh on February 12. Siniora's primary P-5 concern regarding Chapter VII remains France, which he finds ironic considering President Chirac's close relationship with the assassinated Rafiq Hariri. He acknowledged legitimate French concerns about its UNIFIL contingent, but Siniora said that unless all the Security Council members look at Chapter VII seriously, the Syrians will become convinced their campaign to defeat the Tribunal is close to success. If, however, the Syrians detect increasing P-5 interest in Chapter VII, they could well commit a strategic error and try to push Iran's proxy Hizballah too far.

16. (C) PM Siniora is convinced the Syrian regime now feels it is being left behind in the increasing pace of diplomatic activity: Paris III, the Saudi-Iranian discussions, Amr Moussa's diplomatic efforts, Hariri's visit to Moscow, and finally, Putin's visit to Riyadh. They are also "infuriated" that Lebanon, which they still view as no more than a vassal state, is actually conducting foreign policy as if it were a sovereign nation -- this is a development that Syria "simply cannot bear." In Siniora's analysis, the Syrians are therefore pushing Berri very hard, and Berri, "...who is tactically brilliant, but strategically lacking..." is not responding well. This in part explains his recent inconsistency, occasional unexpected aggressiveness, and self-defensive opaqueness.

USE MOUSSA...AND DON'T LET SYRIA DRIVE HIM AWAY

17. (C) The key to this parallel strategy -- promote the

committee idea, while gathering support for Security Council Chapter VII action -- is to ensure that Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa sticks with his diplomatic mission. Implying that Moussa can be easily dissuaded by Berri and other Syrian agents from taking positive action, he asked Washington to use its influence with the Arab League and moderate Arab states to urge Moussa to exert himself in Beirut. Siniora was fairly certain Moussa was on track -- his deputy, Ambassador Hisham Youssef, was arriving in Beirut that afternoon to prepare the ground for Moussa -- but felt additional international encouragement would be worthwhile.

18. (C) While Siniora agreed that SYG Moussa, and Arab League initiatives in general were not often successful, Moussa's presence in Beirut at this time would serve as a moderating force on the March 8th opposition, and especially on Hizballah. Even if the committee idea is not implemented, Moussa's mission in Beirut would buy at least another week and get Lebanon through the sensitive date of February 14. If the committee is established, the resulting dialogue, even though it is focused only on Tribunal documents, will ease tensions in Beirut.

#### BORDER SITUATION

-----

19. (C) Concerning the border issue that the Ambassador raised again in this meeting, PM Siniora expressed with unexpected candor that he was aware Lebanon's eastern border with Syria was a serious problem that required quick action. But he questioned the value of forcing the LAF to execute a task it was not yet ready to execute, while still expecting it to maintain its deployment to the south, as well as its newly assigned responsibilities to protect democratic institutions from domestic threats. Perhaps in an attempt to deflect criticism, he acknowledged the less-than-acceptable recent performance of the LAF, particularly on January 23. But he assured the U.S. that strong corrective action had been taken and clear, direct orders had been issued to prevent a repeat of the lamentable passivity seen in the face of those protests. (Note: Minister of Defense Murr told the Ambassador the same thing in a meeting later on 2/5. End note.)

110. (C) The Prime Minister stated he had taken the

BEIRUT 00000200 003 OF 004

necessary first steps for improved border control by authorizing the German government to move ahead with the Northern Border pilot project, an expedited, integrated approach to securing the country's northern border. If this 3-6 month plan, which addressed both training and equipment needs, is successful, he would extend the project to the critically more important eastern border.

111. (C) Siniora realized this approach is not as quick or comprehensive as the U.S. desires (and as UNSCR 1701 mandates), but asked once again for consideration of political realities. He did suggest that strong Security Council action directed against Syria, such as the establishment of a sanctions committee (a concept Siniora seemed to welcome), may have more impact at this interim stage and give Lebanon the time it needs to establish its own border capability. Perhaps realizing his words indicated that Lebanon was still falling far short of expectations in this critical area, he emphasized that his government well understood both the importance of putting a stop to illicit cross-border traffic and was moving ahead as quickly as possible.

#### LONG RANGE RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA

-----

112. (C) While acknowledging that Lebanon's near-term political situation is still dicey, PM Siniora asked that we share our long-term objectives concerning Syria so that

U.S.-Lebanese strategies remain in synch. The Prime Minister said that in the short term, his government was on a politically-necessary collision course with Syria over the Tribunal, particularly if it is established under Chapter VII. But without the Tribunal, Syria will never genuinely acknowledge Lebanon's sovereignty. Basically, Syria always believed it had carte blanche in Lebanon, and the Tribunal, in effect, shatters that concept. In Siniora's opinion, this is a critically necessary step, but he is starting to plan for what happens after the case/cases are prosecuted. He said that geographic and cultural imperatives require a close and stable relationship with Syria, but one based on respect for sovereignty.

¶13. (C) Siniora was also aware that Hizballah's arms, which were closely linked to Syrian and Iranian regional objectives, had to be removed, but in a manner that would not result in sectarian violence. Although there remain many intervening steps, Siniora asked the U.S. to consider once again his government's 7-point plan, which closely mirrored the objectives enunciated in Lebanon's 1949 Armistice. While the 7-points include placement of Sheba' Farms under UN temporary custodianship, the 7-points also discuss the state's monopoly over the holding of arms. Displaying a cautious optimism, he indicated that UNSCR 1701 implementation, while important, would really only be a starting point for comprehensive regional peace and security.

AMBASSADOR CHEDID  
-----

¶14. (SBU) In response to a status inquiry, Acting Foreign Minister Tarik Mitri informed the Ambassador that the decrees appointing Ambassador Antoine Chedid to his post in Washington still resided with the cabinet secretary. The reason for this delay, he explained, was that it allowed PM Siniora to "bundle" several ambassadorial appointments that might be opposed by President Emile Lahoud (e.g., Chedid) with those the pro-Syrian president was eager to move forward. Notwithstanding the advantages of this maneuver, the Ambassador reminded the Foreign Minister that the time window for accreditation in a possible late February ceremony was rapidly closing. In response, the Prime Minister called the cabinet secretary and instructed him to expedite the process and deliver all the applicable decrees to the president's office as soon as possible. (We will continue to push Siniora and his staff on this issue.)

A REQUEST FOR USG  
-----

¶15. (C) In closing, PM Siniora asked the U.S. to carefully consider banning the sale of cluster munitions to the region. He noted the continuing list of injuries and fatalities from the widespread use of these munitions during last summer's

BEIRUT 00000200 004 OF 004

conflict and stated his firm conviction that banning such indiscriminate weapons would "immeasurably help America's image in the region." Siniora said he realized the issue was being used politically, and that many of the numbers being quoted had little credibility, but he insisted this is a highly important issue and at least a partial solution was well within reach and could be accomplished unilaterally. The Prime Minister emphasized he understood there were complicating factors, but asked that we sincerely evaluate the efficacy of such a move.

FELTMAN